NOVA SCOTIA
Natural Resources

2005 Public Review of Nova Scotia's Game Sanctuaries and Wildlife Management Areas

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Background

The Province of Nova Scotia began setting aside areas to protect wildlife with the creation of Tobeatic Park in 1927. By 2005, 26 areas had been established for the benefit of wildlife, 13 game sanctuaries and 13 wildlife management areas.

In 1996, the Department of Natural Resources' wildlife biologists began evaluating each area for its wildlife benefits and the need for any changes to the associated legislation. As part of the evaluation, each area was scored against six criteria determined to be important to the creation of a wildlife area. During this evaluation period, nine new areas were identified for potential wildlife management area designation.

The Wildlife Division recommended a public review to provide response to the biologists' recommendations and allow the public to submit additional information on each area. It would also give the Division an opportunity to explain the role and utility of our wildlife areas to Nova Scotians.

The biologists saw four major reasons for the review:

1. The original reason for creating some sanctuaries or management areas were no longer valid.
2. Some of the regulations supporting the areas were outdated.
3. Some sanctuaries or management areas were partly or entirely within recently established wilderness areas and there appeared to be no reason for dual designation.
4. Private landowners within some sanctuaries and management areas did not want their property included.

The Review

Information on the history, current use and habitat conditions, and the biologists' recommendations for each existing area, was assembled in a series of 26 reports. Reports were also created to describe the nine proposed new areas. These, together with an introduction, the associated legislation and a history of sanctuary and management areas in Nova Scotia, were brought together in a Wildlife Division web site. The site gave contact information and the ability for an email reply. On January 18, 2005, the site was activated and a press release from Honourable Richard Hurlburt, Minister of Natural Resources, announced the beginning of the review. Newspaper advertisements followed in a couple of days. Within approximately one week the biologists' scoring for each area, for each of the evaluation criteria, was added to the site and more detail of their recommendations was added to the 26 reports. The review was scheduled to run until February 28, 2005.

There were some public requests for a longer review period so a February 25 press release extended the deadline for submissions to May 31. As a result of public feedback, Minister Hurlburt announced May 5, that no wildlife management areas or wildlife sanctuaries would be delisted.

Results

A total of 376 e-mails were received. Several people wrote more than one email. Another 87 submissions were received by mail at the Wildlife Division and the Minister's office received 38 submissions directly. Many of these were also submitted as e-mails or were mailed to both the Wildlife Division and the Minister's office. Duplicate letters were not counted more than once if they were found. Some people made more than one recommendation and some people made no recommendations (e.g., just a request for information). Therefore the numbers summarized below do not equal the total submissions received.

Some petitions were received. One wanted to maintain the status of Liscomb Sanctuary with 22 signatures. There were two petitions in support of maintaining the status of Chignecto, one with 69 signatures and the other 282 signatures. Two snowmobile clubs petitioned in favour of maintaining the status of Chignecto, one with 19 signatures and one with 25. A petition requesting no areas lose their status had 12 signatures. Seventy-five local residents signed a petition concerned that the proposed Cape Sable Island WMA would interfere with traditional use. A petition in support of sanctuaries becoming Nature Reserves, mentioning Blandford in particular, contained 102 signatures. Forty-five submissions received from a petition website requested an extended deadline and opposed any existing areas having their designations changed. In June 2005, this website carried another petition requesting a logging moratorium at Liscomb, asking that Liscomb become a protected wilderness and asking DNR to schedule a series of information sessions, community consultations and policy development workshops about this proposed new wilderness area. As of July 29, five of these submissions had been received.

Submissions regarding existing areas

One hundred and thirty-five submissions were quite general in nature but expressed the opinion that we need to at least maintain the level of protection in existing sanctuaries and wildlife management areas. Most felt more protection was required for these areas and more protected areas were required.

Some submissions specified particular sanctuaries and wildlife management areas that should keep their designations or have their level of protection increased: Blandford 58; Chignecto 57; Liscomb 20; Waverley 13; Sunnybrae 7; Brule and Tobeatic 5 (two of these asked that the Tobeatic be made larger); Abercrombie 4; Shubenacadie 3; Antigonish, Minas Basin, Upper Clements, Melbourne Lake 2; Eastern Shore Islands, Maccan, Pearl Island, Dewey Creek, Martinique 1.

Some submissions specified particular sanctuaries and wildlife management areas that no longer require their designations: Chignecto and Waverley 2; Blandford, Hibernia, Scatarie, Liscomb and Tobeatic 1. One submission wanted the Liscomb delisted because it is destroyed.

Fourteen respondents wanted the Chignecto bowhunt continued. Another submission stated that if bowhunting was allowed at Chignecto, other forms of hunting should be allowed as well. One response was received for each of Liscomb and Chignecto to have the controlled hunts continue. Eight respondents wanted the present designations for all areas maintained but wanted hunting allowed within them. Three of these wanted increased wildlife management or habitat protection.

One submission from a hunting guide was in support of hunting and concerned that hunting would be prohibited in proposed new wildlife management areas. Six prospectors were opposed to protection as it might interfere with their activities and an amateur astronomer was opposed to Liscomb losing its designation and possibly becoming subject to light pollution. One submission expressed concern about possible harmful impacts to First Nations aboriginal and treaty rights. One submission was a request to allow development of hiking trails at Blandford.

A submission was received from a farmer requesting his property be removed from Shubenacadie Wildlife Management Area. Nine other submissions were generally in favor of the recommended options but specifically opposed to removing private land from the Shubenacadie Wildlife Management Area.

We received 18 requests for additional information and four requests to extend the submission deadline. One submission offered to give a small island to the Province and another criticized the website design.

Submissions regarding proposed new areas

There were 17 submissions generally in favour of creating new areas but not specific to a particular site. Three submissions specifically supported a new area near Amherst. Of these, one was in favour of allowing hunting and trapping, one was opposed to hunting and trapping and one wanted the area to be a wilderness area or nature reserve. Each of the following new areas received one specific submission in support: Ciboux Island, Cape Sable Island, The Brothers, Eastern Shore Island additions, and one submission supported the proposed new Minas Basin WMA if agriculture is not adversely impacted.

Five submissions supported continued hunting at Cole Harbour and three submissions supported continued hunting at Cape Sable Island. A Cape Sable Island resident expressed concern about government "shoving people around on their own property."

Submissions specific to Belleisle included: in support 1; in support if agriculture is not adversely impacted 1; concerned wildlife management area status will have an adverse impact on agriculture 1; hunting should continue 1; dog trials should continue 1; hunting and trapping should be prohibited 1.

Submissions from parties with targeted interest

Letters were sent directly to associations or companies who may own lands in an area or had specific interests in the process.

Maple Leaf Foods was not opposed to Dewey Creek losing its management area status.

The Kings County Wildlife Association were not opposed to Dewey Creek and the current Minas Basin Wildlife Management Areas losing their status.

Ducks Unlimited was very supportive of new management areas at Amherst, Belleisle, Cape Sable, Cole Harbour and in favour of maintaining the status of Chignecto. However, they had some concerns about changing the status of private land at Shubenacadie.

The Queens County Fish and Game Association, the sole landowner in the Hibernia Wildlife Management Area, asked to have management area status removed. They also wanted increased protection for the Tobeatic.

Neenah Paper agreed that Abercrombie and Manganese Mines should become no hunting areas. They also agreed with the proposal to delist the Liscomb Sanctuary.

The Boy Scouts Association in New Glasgow had safety concerns about opening Sunnybrae to hunting and the impact it would have on nature in the area. Similarly the Nova Scotia Community College in Truro was concerned about safety at Manganese Mines.

The Bowhunters Association of Nova Scotia requested the Department maintain the Chignecto bowhunt.

The Canadian Wildlife Service wrote in support of the proposed wildlife management areas at Amherst, Belleisle, Cape Sable Island, Cole Harbour, Ciboux, Grassy Island and The Brothers.

Nova Scotia Environment and Labour commented on how protective measures of sanctuaries and management areas that overlap protected wilderness areas may compliment wilderness area management. For example, wilderness areas do not generally prohibit or limit hunting or sport fishing. Where such restrictions are important to maintaining wildlife values, or supporting existing recreational use in a wilderness area, Environment and Labour suggested that continued designation of an overlapping wildlife management area or sanctuary may be desired. Environment and Labour also expressed an interest in jointly reviewing specific existing and proposed areas to discuss opportunities to maximize protection objectives.

St Francis Xavier University wrote in support of the Antigonish Harbour area because it was an important research area for their faculty and students.

The Ecology Action Centre detailed how the Liscomb, Chignecto Tobeatic, Blandford, and Waverley should have Crown lands added to existing Wilderness Areas, or create new Wilderness Areas or Nature Reserves. They also proposed that the new wildlife management area near Amherst should be a Wilderness Area or Nature Reserve.

A meeting was held with planners from the Atlantic Service Centre of Parks Canada on June 16 dealing with the Louisburg Sanctuary. At the meeting they learned that the Minister was no longer considering delisting the property.

Government Response

1. Since most respondents asked that the current sanctuaries and wildlife management areas remain in place, none of the current areas will be delisted. The major prohibitions regarding hunting and trapping will also be maintained.

2. The most widely held opinion expressed by respondents was the need for more protected areas. Government is supporting the efforts of forest industry representatives and provincial

environmental organizations through the Colin Stewart Forestry Forum, as part of a broader process to meet government commitments to work toward a comprehensive system of protected areas.

3. There was broad public support for the creation of the nine new Wildlife Management Areas. Regulations will be developed and approved to establish the new areas while accommodating residents' concerns for continued traditional use of the areas. These were Ciboux Island, Cape Sable Island, the Brothers Islands, Grassy Island, Minas Basin, Belleisle Marsh, Amherst Marsh, Cole Harbour and an expansion to the Eastern Shore Islands.

4. Improved habitat protection for the current Sanctuaries and Wildlife Management Areas was important to many respondents. The regulations for each area will be reviewed to ensure appropriate habitat protection measures and to recognize the current staffing structure and policies of the Department of Natural Resources. Since each area has its own set of regulations, developing new regulations will be approached on a priority basis.

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